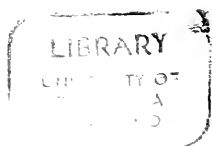


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# The Providence Athenaeum

1753—1911

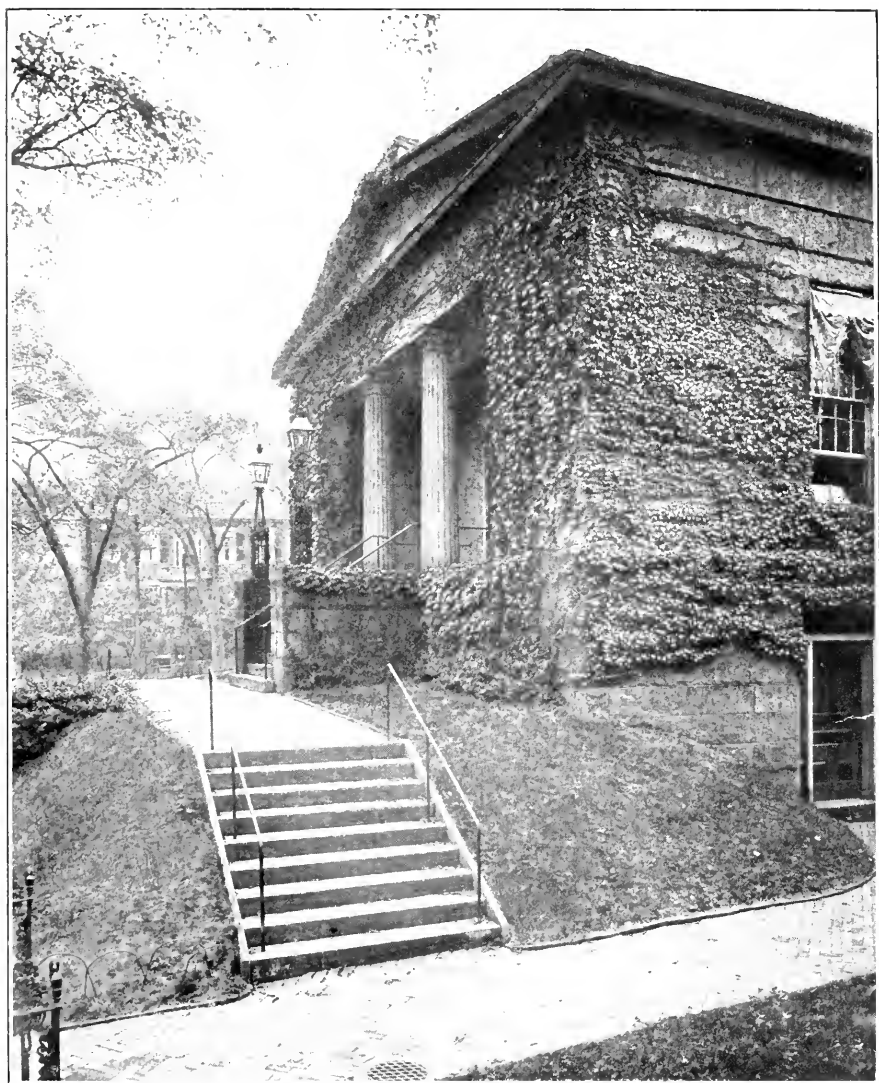
BY

JOSEPH LEROY HARRISON









THE PROVIDENCE ATHENÆUM

# THE PROVIDENCE ATHENAEUM\*

1753—1911

THE PROVIDENCE ATHENAEUM, the real foundation of which dates back to 1753, is one of the few survivors of the "public" libraries of our forefathers, a distinctive type whose ownership is vested in its proprietors and whose origin and fullest growth cover the half centuries preceding and following the Revolutionary War. That it may be seen in a proper historical perspective, as a representative type of the proprietary library, a brief summary of the development of library history in the United States is essential.

## EARLY LIBRARY HISTORY

The public library as we know it to-day is the result of a gradual and natural development, of which the period of the proprietary library forms one link in a chain whose beginning is happily anchored to the small and solemn private libraries of early colonial days.

In 1620 the first library in America designed to be used by a constituency larger than the family was bequeathed by the Rev. Thomas Burgrave to a projected college at Henrico, Va. In 1636 Harvard University was founded and two years later its library. The period from the establishment of these libraries to the organization of the Philadelphia Library Company covered something more than a century. This period witnessed also the foundation of William and Mary and Yale college libraries, 1693 and 1701; the establishment, 1697 to 1730, by the Rev. Thomas Bray, for a brief period commissary of the English church in Maryland, of a large number of parochial and lending libraries,

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\* Reprinted, by permission, from an article in the *New England Magazine* of September and October, 1911, by Joseph LeRoy Harrison.

extending from a nucleus of nearly thirty parishes in Maryland into Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, and the occasional organization of "town," "parish" or "neighborhood" libraries, whose origin and history are for the most part obscure. The following, however, can be mentioned with certainty: Boston, Mass., King's Chapel Library, as early as 1698, and Town Library, as early as 1653; Concord, Mass., Town Library, as early as 1672; Philadelphia, Pa., Parish Library of Christ Church, 1695; Annapolis, Md., "one and probably two public libraries," 1696-1697; New York, N. Y., Sharp collection, given in 1713 to found a "public library" and the Millington Bequest, 1730, the foundation of the "Corporation Library;" and Louisquisset district, R. I. (in what is now Lincoln, then within the limits of Providence) "Circulating Library," some time before 1711.

The year 1731 began a new era in the intellectual life of the American people, an era of co-operation for the procurement of books. It was in this year that Benjamin Franklin proposed to his fellow members of the Junto, a debating society which subsequently became the American Philosophical Society, that they bring their books, obtained in these early days with difficulty and at great cost, to the club where they might be enjoyed by all. The direct result of this co-operation was the formation of the Philadelphia Library Company, the establishment of which is so important, not only as the first of its type but historically in connection with library development in this country, that Franklin's account, as given in his Autobiography, is of special interest:

"About this time, our club meeting, not at a tavern, but in a little room of Mr. Grace's, set apart for that purpose, a proposition was made by me, that, since our books were often referred to in our disquisitions upon the queries, it might be convenient to us to have them all together where we met, that upon occasion they might be consulted; and by thus clubbing our books to a common library, we should, while we lik'd to keep them together,

have each of us the advantage of using the books of all the other members, which would be nearly as beneficial as if each owned the whole. It was lik'd and agreed to, and we fill'd one end of the room with such books as we could best spare. The number was not so great as we expected; and tho' they had been of great use, yet some inconveniences occurring for want of due care of them, the collection, after about a year, was separated, and each took his books home again.

"And now I set on foot my first project of a public nature, that for a subscription library. I drew up the proposals, got them put into form by our great scrivener, Brockden, and, by the help of my friends in the Junto, procured fifty subscribers of forty shillings each to begin with, and ten shillings a year for fifty years, the term our company was to continue. We afterwards obtain'd a charter, the company being increased to one hundred: this was the mother of all the North American subscription libraries, now so numerous. It is become a great thing itself, and continually increasing. These libraries have improved the general conversation of the Americans, made the common tradesmen and farmers as intelligent as most gentlemen from other countries, and perhaps have contributed in some degree to the stand so generally made throughout the colonies in defence of their privileges."

Franklin's very simple but hitherto unthought of device, that of the joint stock library association, was contagious. Naturally adopted first in and about Philadelphia it soon spread throughout the colonies. Before the first shot of the Revolution was fired at Lexington the seed of library co-operation had taken firm root. Libraries had been founded as follows:—

Pennsylvania: Philadelphia Library Company, 1731; Carpenters' Library Company, 1736; Four Monthly Meetings of Friends, 1742, and German Society of Pennsylvania, 1764, Philadelphia; Darby Library Company, 1743, Darby; Union Library Company, 1755, Hatborough; Chester Library Company, 1769, Chester; Juliana Library, 1770, Lancaster.

New Jersey: Burlington Library Company, 1757, Burlington.

New York: New York Society Library, 1754, "Corporation Library," 1730, and Union Library Society, 1771, New York city.

Massachusetts: Prince Library, 1758, and New England Library, 1758, Boston; Social Library, 1760, Salem; Social Library, 1763, Leominster; Second Social Library, 1758, Hingham.

Connecticut: Proprietors' Library, 1737, Pomfret.

Maine: "Revolving Library," 1751, parishes of Kittery and York; Portland Library, 1763, Portland.

South Carolina: Charleston Library Company, 1748, Charleston; Winyaw Indigo Society, 1755, Georgetown.

Rhode Island: Redwood Library, 1747, Newport; Providence Library Company, 1753, Providence.

Besides these libraries, which may be characterized as general in their scope, college libraries were founded by Princeton, then the College of New Jersey, 1746; University of Pennsylvania, 1755; Columbia, then King's College, 1757; Brown, then Rhode Island College, 1767; Dartmouth, 1770, and Rutgers, 1770. College society libraries had their start at Yale by the founding of the Linonian and Brothers of Unity libraries, 1753; theological libraries by the Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, Pa., 1742, and scientific libraries by the American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, 1743.

These libraries, together with those noted under the second period\* of library development, were the chief means of general literary culture open to Americans before the Revolutionary War. They represent the first half of the third period of library growth. The second half extended from the close of the war to 1826. The entire period covered nearly a century, that is, from 1731 to 1826, and has exerted a pronounced, though gradually lessen-

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\*The first period may be regarded as that of the small private library of the home, extending to Thomas Burggrave's bequest in 1620, and the second period from 1620 to 1731, when Franklin inaugurated the co-operative idea of the use of books.

ing influence, to the present day. The growth of the proprietary library was naturally checked by the Revolution, but from 1785 to the close of the century and during the first quarter of the nineteenth century Franklin's idea spread rapidly throughout the country. "Society," "social," "town," "association," "Athenæum," "company," and "Franklin society" libraries, as they were variously called, continued to be established in the colonies and in most of the new states as they came into the Union, including Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana and Alabama.

During the latter part of this third period of library development there began to appear a new and distinct type of library. Though open to all, they were designed, as their names imply, for young men of the merchants' and mechanics' classes. Some of the more important of these libraries, with the dates of founding, were the Mercantile Library, Boston, 1820; Mercantile Library, New York, 1820; Mechanic Apprentices' Library, Portland, Me., 1820; Mechanics Apprentices' Library, Boston, Mass., 1820; Mechanics' Society, Detroit, Mich., 1820; Apprentices' Library, New York city, 1820; Apprentices' Library Company, Philadelphia, Pa., 1820; Charitable Mechanics' Association, Salem, Mass., 1820; Mercantile Library, Philadelphia, 1821; Association of Mechanics and Manufacturers, Providence, R. I., 1821; Printers' Library, New York city, 1823; Middlesex Mechanics' Association, Lowell, Mass., 1825; Mechanics' Association, Portsmouth, N. H., 1826; Mechanics' Association, Bangor, Me., 1826; Young Men's Institute, New Haven, Conn., 1826.

In that a fee was charged for their use they were allied to the proprietary library, but their scope was broader and their establishment one step nearer the free public library. They were not exclusive, as the college library, or limited to those who could afford the initial cost of a share, as the proprietary library, but were open to all for a comparatively small annual fee. They were designed not only to furnish books but to provide a general higher education for young men who desired to supplement their school work.

In leaving this third period of library development, essentially the period of the proprietary and mercantile libraries, it may be said that an interesting and important chapter of library history, one closely allied to the educational history of the country as well, has never been written, and offers a rich field for some future historian. From the special viewpoint of library history the period is important for its libraries are the foundation on which the free public library of to-day rests. They gave much to their successors, in earnest purpose, in spirit, catholicity of view, even in methods, but above all they prepared the way and demonstrated the need of something more than they could supply.

For the purpose of this introduction, essentially concerned in the history of the proprietary library as a background for the subject of this article, the subsequent steps in the development of library history in the United States may be briefly stated.

The fourth period of development was the real beginning of the public library system in America. It dates back to the year 1826, when Governor De Witt Clinton, of New York, advocated in his annual message to the legislature the establishment of free school libraries. The founding of these libraries by state governments recognized one of the most important functions of the public library, that is, it recognized the library as an essential part of the system of public education and as such entitled to a share in public taxation. That the state should educate its citizens and for that purpose maintain schools was a principle already firmly grounded, but now for the first time in history it recognized the library as both the complement and supplement of the school, a factor in its educational system.

The fifth step was that of libraries endowed by private generosity and thrown open to the public on such conditions as their founders thought wise. The old Astor Library of New York, and the Peabody Institute, of Baltimore, are examples. The origin of endowed libraries dates back to about the same time as that of the free public library and to a great extent their scope and interests have been identical.



Such is the history of the library movement in the United States up to the time when that movement, with the founding of the Boston Public Library in 1854, broadened in its scope and became the free public library movement; which, in its turn, underwent such an awakening in 1876 as to begin a new epoch in the history of libraries, an epoch already spoken of as the modern library movement.

The origin of The Providence Athenæum, formed by the union of the Providence Library Company and the old Providence Athenæum, dates back to the first half of the third period. It was one of the direct results of Franklin's influence and Providence was among the first towns to follow Philadelphia in the establishment of a library, if, indeed, in the neighborhood circulating library in the Louisquisset district, it did not antedate it. At least only twelve towns throughout the colonies, exclusive of those in which the Bray and college libraries had been established, anticipated Providence in founding a library, that is, Kittery and York parishes, in the Province of Maine; Boston and Concord, in Massachusetts; Pomfret, in Connecticut; Newport, in Rhode Island; New York city; and Philadelphia and Darby, in Pennsylvania.

The history of the institution divides naturally into that of the Providence Library Company, 1753 to 1836; the old Providence Athenæum, 1831 to 1836, and The Providence Athenæum, 1836 to 1911, and will be treated under these three heads.

## PROVIDENCE LIBRARY COMPANY

1753-1836

Among those most interested in the formation of the Providence Library Company was Stephen Hopkins, governor of Rhode Island and signer of the Declaration of Independence. There is a striking similarity between his experiences in Providence and those of Franklin in Philadelphia. Like Franklin he was a lover and collector of books, and at the home of his grand-

father, Captain Samuel Wilkinson, in the Louisquisset neighborhood, he undoubtedly used the circulating library of which mention has been made. Removing to Providence from his farm in Scituate, R. I., in 1742, he found he had soon absorbed the few books to which he had access, and then, like Franklin, not finding book-shops at hand, he joined with his friends in sending to England for books.

The Providence Library Company was established in 1753. The preamble to the subscription list, dated March twenty-second of that year, reads :

*"Whereas* a Collection or Library of usefull and Edifying Books will most certainly tend to the Benefit and Instruction of the Inhabitants of this Town and County of Providence, and the Rising Generation thereto belonging.—*Therefore* We the Subscribers considering the Advantages thereof, and the Improvements which may be thereby made, not only by us but by our Posterity, and for the Encouragement of the Same, have hereunto voluntarily Subscribed our Names, and opposite thereto such Sum of Money as we are willing to Contribute towards the usefull and Laudable Design aforesaid. Which said Sum by us Severally Subscribed opposite to our respective Names, We the Subscribers do hereby Promise to pay on Demand, unto such Person or Persons as shall (when the Subscription is full) be by the Majority of us the Subscribers nominated and appointed to receive the Same, and which, by and with Our Approbation, or the Majority of us, is to be by such Receiver appropriated to and for the Use aforesaid, and to and for no other Use or Purpose whatsoever. *In Witness* and Confirmation of which We have hereunto Severally set our Names this Twenty Second Day of March Anno Domini One Thousand Seven Hundred and Fifty Three.

*"N. B.* There is no Subscription for the Use aforesaid to be taken under the Subscription of Twenty Five Pounds Old Tenor, but as much more as any well Spirited Subscriber shall think proper."

The list contains eighty-six names, eighty-one subscriptions at £25, three at £27, 10s, one at £30 and one at £50.

Among the original subscribers, all prominent in the business and social life of Providence of that day, may be mentioned :

Nehemiah Allen, Nathan Angel, Samuel Angel, Job Arnold, Jonathan Arnold, Jonathan Ballou, Benjamin Bowen, Ephraim Bowen, James Brown, John Brown (son of Elisha), Nicholas Brown, John Brown, Moses Brown, Obadiah Brown, Joseph Bucklin, Sarah Burrough, John Cole, Gideon Comstock, Nicholas Cooke, Benjamin Cushing, Stephen Hopkins, Esek Hopkins, George Jackson, Richard Jackson, John Jenckes, Samuel Nightingale, Jonathan Olney, Joseph Olney, Richard Olney, Thomas Owen, Ambrose Page, John Power, Barzillai Richmond, Joseph Russell, Darius Sessions, Joseph Snow, Joshua Spooner, Richard Steere, Thomas Steere, Paul Tew, Elisha Tillinghast, Nicholas Tillinghast, Daniel Tillinghast, David Vanderlight, Resolved Waterman, Thomas Waterman, William Wheton, Jeremiah Whipple, Joseph Whipple, Stephen Whipple, Jacob Whitman, and David Wilkinson.

The first meeting of the new society was held at the house of Mr. Joseph Angell, December 15, 1753. Mr. Nicholas Brown was appointed clerk and Messrs. Nicholas Brown, Nicholas Tillinghast and John Randal a committee to collect subscriptions. The second meeting was held on Christmas day following, also at the home of Mr. Angell. Messrs. Stephen Hopkins, Samuel Nightingale, Ephraim Bowen, Nicholas Cooke, David Vanderlight and Paul Tew were appointed "to make out a Catalogue of Books, with the Sterling prices affixed in order to send to England for the intended Library."\* Subscribers were allowed to "put in such Books as the Com.<sup>tee</sup> judge proper to be received to the full value, or any Part of their Subscriptions." At a meeting on January 5, 1754, the catalogue prepared by the committee was accepted. On February first the committee on subscriptions

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\* In all quotations from the old record books the spelling, punctuation, capitalization and phraseology of the original have been retained.

reported that it had collected £1500 old tenor. It was voted to deliver this sum to Mr. Paul Tew, who reported on February sixth "that he had contracted with Mr. Obadiah Brown . . . to deliver him One Hundred Pounds Sterling worth of Books . . . to be delivered at Rhode Island, within Six Months."

Messrs. Stephen Hopkins, Nicholas Tillinghast, Paul Tew and Nicholas Brown were appointed on August second a committee to draw up "such Rules and Orders as are requisite for the well regulating said Library." Five days later the committee reported a body of rules containing seventeen articles of which the following extracts are of interest:

"That when the Library is so far furnished with Books as to make it fit to be opened for use, some proper Person be appointed Librarian . . . to attend one Afternoon in each Week the opening of the Library . . . to Shew the Library to all Strangers, who are Gentlemen, and desire to see it.

"That no Proprietor shall . . . have at one Time more than one Folio, or one Quarto, or one large Octavo Volume, or two small Octavo or Duodecimo Volumes; the Folios to be returned . . . within three Months Quartos within two, and Octavos and duodecimos within one month . . .

"That . . . any Person of a good Character may hereafter be . . . made a Proprietor . . . he first paying to the Librarian Three Pounds Sterling . . .

"That all Ministers and Preachers for the Time being among the Different Denominations of Christians within the Town of Providence shall be allowed the same Liberty . . . as tho they were Proprietors . . .

"That whenever the General Assembly sits in the Town of Providence the Librarian . . . shall deliver to whomsoever they appoint the Keys of the Library . . . so that the Members may have opportunity to read any of the Books, if they see Cause, trusting to their Honor to leave them in their Places.

"That Mr. Nicholas Brown be the first Librarian, and every Saturday, from two to five of the Clock in the Afternoon be the Times of opening the Library."

If Mr. Obadiah Brown kept his contract, the books probably arrived in August, 1754. They were placed by permission of the General Assembly, granted the February previous, in the council chamber of the Town House (also referred to as the "Court House" and the "State House") which stood on Meeting street, just above the Friends' Meeting-house, on the site of the present Meeting street school house. The old "Register book" contains a nineteen page "Catalogue of all the Books belonging to the Library in Providence, as well those which were procured here as those which were purchased in London." This catalogue is neatly arranged alphabetically under the size of the book, that is, folio, octavo, duodecimo and twenty-four mo, the customary grouping of those early days, and the number of volumes and cost sterling is given with each title. Five-hundred-and-eighty-three books are listed. Though every title is of interest, as an indication of the sturdy character of the purchases of those early libraries, the list is too long to give in its entirety. Those which survived the fire of 1758 and are on the shelves of the Athenæum to-day may be enumerated as perhaps fairly representative of the entire collection, or at least of the books in circulation. They are as follows: Henry Baker, *Microscope made easy*, Lond. 1744; George Bickham, *Universal penman*, Lond. 1743; John Campbell, *Lives of the admirals*, Lond. 1750; Nicolas Fouquet, *Counsels of wisdom*, Oxford, 1736; James Fraser, *History of Nadir Shah*, Lond. 1742; William Gibson, *Farrier's new guide*, Lond. 1735; Pierre Gilles, *Antiquities of Constantinople*, Lond. 1729; Hugo Grotius, *Rights of war and peace*, Lond. 1738; Stephen Hales, *Statical essays*, Lond. 1740; Herodotus, *History*, translated by Isaac Littlebury, Lond. 1737; Francis Hutcheson, *Inquiry into the original of our ideas of beauty and virtue*, Lond. 1753; John Keill, *Introduction to natural philosophy*, Lond. 1745; Thomas Pitts, *New martyrology*, Lond. 1633; Sallust, *Works*, translated by Thomas Gordon, Lond. n. d.; Sharaf-ad-Din-Ali *al Yezli*, *History of Timur-bec*, Lond. 1723; Peter Shaw, *Chemical lectures*, Lond. 1755; Sir John Spelman, *Life of*

Alfred the Great, Lond. 1709; John Tillotson, Works, Lond. 1752.

A little more than four years after the installation of the library the Town House was burned. There is a gap in the Register from 1755 to 1762, but under date of the latter year the following account of the fire is given :

“The Books being arrived from England, neat and proper Cases were erected in the Council Chamber, in the Town House in Providence for receiving them; and being placed there in proper Order, the Library was opened, and the Books received and returned by the Proprietors, agreeable to the foregoing Rules, and continued to be used in that manner, to great Satisfaction, as well as Profit and Advantage, until the twenty fourth Day of December One Thousand Seven Hundred and Fifty eight, when the Town House with all the Books in it was entirely consumed by Fire. This accident was occasioned thus. The General Assembly Sitting in the Court House the preceding Week, when the Weather was very cold, Large Fires were kept in the Chambers. The Chimneys, not being built from the Ground, but founded on the Chamber Floors, were Supported by Timber, to which the Fire communicated itself through the Hearths, and there remained concealed, from Saturday, when the Assembly left the House, until the Sunday following, about Ten o’Clock at Night, when the Inside of the House was discovered to be wholly in Flames. The Fire being got to so great a Height, it was impossible to save the House or any Thing in it. One Dwelling House also which stood next to it, was burnt down. The Friends Meeting House, and another House which Stood near it, suffered great Damage by the Fire, but were saved by the Diligence and great Activity of the People, with the Help of one Water Engine, the only one then in the Town.”

Immediately following the account of the fire is this record of the successful attempt to re-establish the library :

“The Library being thus lost, except about Seventy Volumes then abroad in the Hands of the Proprietors, Application was

made to the General Assembly, who at their Session in the month of February one Thousand Seven Hundred and Sixty granted a Lottery, the Deduction from which, namely one Thousand Dollars, to be appropriated to the purchasing Books for a New Library, of which Books when purchased, the Proprietors of the Former Library were to be the Owners together with all such others, who should take Sixty Tickets apiece on their own Risque in this Lottery. The Lottery being compleated, one Thousand Dollars were delivered to a Committee appointed by the Proprietors for that Purpose, who Sent it in Bills of Exchange to Mr. John Richardson a Stationer in London together with a Catalogue of Books to be purchased, who procured and Shipped them to Boston, where they arrived some Time in the month of January, 1762.

“The Proprietors having Advice that their Books, to the amount of Two Hundred and twenty Pounds eleven Shillings and Six Pence Sterling were arrived in Boston, met together in Providence the thirtieth Day of January one Thousand Seven Hundred and Sixty two and having chosen the Honorable Stephen Hopkins Esquire Governor of the Colony of Rhode Island to be their Moderator, they voted and ordered a Tax to be assessed on the Proprietors at Forty Shillings old Tenor and one Quarter of a Dollar in Silver, that the Librarian collect, and the Treasurer receive this Tax, and that no Proprietor receive any Books until this Tax be by him respectively paid. It was further resolved that Mr. Silas Downer be Librarian, and Mr. Nicholas Tillinghast Treasurer of the Proprietors; And that the Honble Stephen Hopkins, Nicholas Cooke, Esqr, Mr. Esek Hopkins, Mr. John Cole, and Mr. Nicholas Brown be a Standing Committee, who are to provide a proper Place for the Books, procure them to be transported from Boston, to receive of Mr. Joseph Lawrence what books belonging to the late Library are in his Hands, and to do every other Necessary Thing more especially to draw up and present to the Proprietors at their next meeting a Sett of Rules and Orders for the Good Regulation of the Proprietors, respecting the Library.—adjourned to Feb. 12. 1762.

"1762. On the ninth Day of February A. D. 1762. The Books were brought into Town from Boston, and put up in Order in Mr Esek Hopkins's Shop."

A catalogue of the books of the new library appears in the Register under the general heading, "A Catalogue of all the Books belonging to the Providence Library. Those marked with an Asterisk (\*) are such books as were saved in the Hands of the Proprietors when the late Library was burned." This catalogue, containing 911 titles, was printed in 1768, together with the "Rules for governing the proprietors of and institutions for rendering useful the books belonging to the Providence Library."

The books remained in Mr. Hopkins' shop from 1762 until 1764 (probably the fall of that year) when the Register contains this note of their removal to the new Court House :

"1764. This Day the Library was removed from Mr Esek Hopkins's, where it hath been kept ever Since it arrived from England, into the Council Chamber, where, proper, and very neat Shelves, with large pannelled Doors, were put up at the charge of the Proprietors, and so contrived, as not to take from the Beauty of the whole Finishing of the Chamber, which is elegantly done in Belection Work. For the Privilege of keeping the Books in this Place, the Members of the General Assembly are to have the Inspection of the Books, during their Session here."

Between 1764 and the granting of the charter in 1798 the Register contains little of importance in the history of the institution. The "Charter and by-laws of the Providence Library company," published in 1818, contains, however, this interesting note :

"In the year 1770, Rhode Island College was established in this town,\* and the college edifice erected the same year—on this occasion the Library Company offered the use of the books to the officers and students of that institution, until a library could be procured sufficient for that respectable establishment. Under these circumstances and from the doors being left open to

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\* Removing from Warren, R. I., where it was first established.



accommodate the members of the Legislature, other persons in the absence of the Librarian, had access to the books; many of which were lost, and the value and usefulness of the Library was evidently declining; and the Proprietors having no corporate powers, had not sufficient authority to enforce a compliance with their votes and regulations. It was therefore determined to apply to the General Assembly for an act of incorporation; and on that being obtained to adopt such other measures to preserve the books and increase their numbers as might render the Institution more useful and respectable, and to bear some proportion to the progressive increase of the town."

As early as March, 1783, it was proposed that the next meeting of the board should consider "the Expediency of Petitioning for a Charter." The minutes of the April meeting, however, contain no mention of such consideration, nor do those of any subsequent meeting until that of March 7, 1795, and the library was not incorporated until October 31, 1798. The act contains seven sections, in addition to the following introduction, which is given in full because of the interesting light it throws on the early conditions, struggles and purposes of the library:

"State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations:

In General Assembly,  
October Session, A. D. 1798.

#### AN ACT

To incorporate the Directors and Company of the Providence Library.

Whereas, Jabez Bowen, Moses Brown, William Richmond, John Smith, Nicholas Brown, Joseph Jenckes and Paris Jenckes Tillinghast, the standing Committee of the Providence Library Company and others, proprietors of said Library, have presented their petition to this General Assembly, setting forth, that the Library of which the said Committee have the superintendence, was established in the year 1753, with much exertion, and with

the design that it should prove beneficial to future generations. That at a certain period of its existence, the said Library consisted of upwards of eight hundred volumes of well selected books, but that the number at present is much reduced, the sets broken, and the volumes mutilated and defaced. That this diminution of the number and quality of the Books is to be attributed principally, to a want of power in the proprietors, to establish laws, ordinances, and regulations, for the government of the said Library; in which power is included that of determining the manner and form of obtaining, transferring and conveying the rights or shares in said Library, and that of imposing taxes upon the rights or shares, so that the institution may possess the faculty of supplying the decrease and diminution, natural to such establishments, and also the means of providing such compensation for the Librarian, as would induce a person qualified for that office to give such attention thereto as would accommodate the proprietors and preserve the Library from injury. That one further object of the proprietors is, to increase the number of Books in the Library, and, if thought expedient, to add thereto such other articles and apparatus, in addition to the Books, as may facilitate the study of the different sciences; and that at several meetings holden in pursuance of publick notice in the newspapers, the company have resolved to petition this Assembly for an Act to incorporate them. Wherefore, the persons before mentioned prayed, that they might be incorporated with the powers before mentioned, and such further powers as might be necessary to carry into effect the purposes of the company as before mentioned. And, whereas, this assembly are sensible of the utility of the said institution, and are willing to grant to the proprietors such powers as will enable them to effect the purposes thereby intended."

The two decades from 1798, the year of incorporation, to 1817-1818, when the charter was twice amended, were interesting years in the work and development of the institution. In January 1801 the governing board took up the question of increasing "the Library by the Admission of Subscribers for the

number of One Hundred and forty new shares." The effort was successful, and the added revenue was largely used for the purchase of books.

With the renewed life of the institution the board began as early as 1802 to consider the advisability of securing new quarters, realizing that the Court House was inconvenient of location and that for too large a part of the time it was inaccessible because closed. At a meeting held in September a committee was appointed to look into and report on the matter, but no definite action was taken. Seven years later, in 1809, a committee was appointed to confer with those having charge of the building of a new grammar school as to the feasibility of an additional story for the use of the library. During this same year an offer of land "North of Angell Street" was made by Mr. Moses Brown and even a vote to build was passed. In 1813 the "Committee for Procuring a room for the Library" was instructed "to Confer with Mr. Thos. Burgess on the Subject of purchasing the building in Bowen's lane" occupied by him. And again, in 1815, it was "Voted that Mr. Tillinghast be a committee to draw up a subscription paper for the raising a sum of money to enable the Company to erect a building for a Library Room." The matter of location was finally settled in 1816. On August 16 of this year what was known as the "Literary and News Room," which Mr. Howland speaks of as "a very respectable literary establishment, which had been purchased by a number of gentlemen in this town" was absorbed by the Providence Library Company on the basis of admitting its members as proprietors in the company. At a meeting of the company held in September it was voted to accept an offer made by Mr. Thomas Arnold of the rooms occupied by the Literary and News Room, in Cheapside, as Market Square and the beginning of North Main street were then called, and the books were soon removed from the Court House to the literary quarters.

At the close of a six-page narrative covering the history of the

Providence Library Company, 1753 to 1818, Mr. John Howland says :

“It then became necessary to apply for further powers and for such alterations in the act of incorporation as a change of circumstances had rendered necessary and proper; and at the session of the General Assembly held in February, 1817, the act altering and amending the Charter, was passed; since which the By-Laws and Regulations which follow the same have been passed and established by the Company.

“To encourage, particularly among the youth of the town, a taste for reading, it was deemed advisable to establish a Reading Room in connexion with the Library. Accordingly one has been opened in the Library Room, to which the Proprietors have access every day, and also such persons as have become annual subscribers, pursuant to a resolution of the Corporation. Many have availed themselves of the opportunity of becoming subscribers, and the beneficial effects of the establishment are already apparent. All true friends to the literary character of this community must feel an interest in its increased prosperity; to insure which, and to render it permanent and worthy of the town, only requires the liberality and attention of the wealthy, and the punctual payment of the assessments by the Proprietors in general.

The charter amendment of 1817 was general in its scope, that is, practically a new act of incorporation, while that passed by the General Assembly at the October session of 1818, entitled “An act granting additional powers to the directors and company of the Providence Library,” conferred upon the company the right to sell shares for non-payment of dues.

The last eighteen years of the life of the Library Company is of no great interest. In 1825 a committee consisting of Mr. Charles F. Tillinghast and Dr. Joseph Mauran was appointed to “devise ways and means to increase the funds of this institution,” and the year following it was “Voted that a Committee of three be appointed to Petition the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island at their present Session for the grant of a Lottery to raise

a sum not exceeding Ten Thousand Dollars to aid the funds of the Corporation with a view to the Enlargement of the Library." At a meeting in June, 1827, it was reported that Moses Brown had "signified his intention of making a donation of a lot of ground and a sum of money for the use of the Library." At a meeting of stockholders, in March, 1831, there was ordered recorded a deed, dated October 14, 1830, from the heirs of Nathan Waterman to the Providence Library Company, conveying the Waterman homestead, providing a library building should be erected on the lot within five years. The deed also contained this curious condition: "That the said Library building shall be erected without a cellar, it being the object and intention of the aforesaid Grantors, to preserve undisturbed, the remains of their ancestors, deposited on said lot." A committee consisting of Messrs. Horatio G. Bowen, Moses B. Ives and Charles F. Tillinghast was appointed "to procure drafts and estimates of a building." It reported on December 22, 1835, "that so much time passed while the Committee was making the necessary arrangements, that before they had fully completed them, the time within which the Company could build upon the Waterman lot expired."

It is probable that during the closing period of its existence the library was twice moved. In May, 1820, it was voted to remove to "the rooms now in the occupation of the Eagle Insurance Company," and the Providence directory published in January, 1824, gives the address of the Library Company as No. 8 North Main street. In April, 1824, it was voted to move into rooms over the Washington Insurance Office, No. 1 Market Square.

From July, 1832, to the close of its separate existence the "Minute book" contains repeated entries of conferences between the Company and the newly started Athenæum with a view to their union and also of the appointment of various committees to meet those appointed by the Athenæum in an endeavor to arrange a satisfactory basis of union.

The record of the meeting of the Company, December 22, 1835, closes with the following minute:

"Resolved, that Mess<sup>rs</sup> Zach<sup>r</sup> Allen, William R. Staples and Thomas B. Fenner, be a Committee with power in their discretion, to sell or dispose of the property and settle the debts of this Corporation and to pay the balance of the proceeds if any shall remain, after said payments, to the Treasurer."

The final entry in the old Minute book, after recording the proceedings of a special meeting held May 14, 1836, reads, "Meeting adjourned sine die."

The Register and Minute books contain many interesting and often quaint records.

In 1769 it was voted "That the School Masters for the Time being . . . who shall keep School in the Brick School House . . . shall have the privilege of the Library," and in 1802, "That the Preceptors of the Public Schools have the use of Bickham Universal Penman . . . each to have it one month only in Rotation."

The printers of the local papers were allowed the use of the library in return for printing library notices. Notices of missing books were published in the papers but were not always successful in bringing in the volumes for on at least one occasion, in 1799, the directors themselves waited on the delinquent proprietors and demanded the books. Mr. John Smith, Esq., and Mr. Joseph Jenkes were appointed "to Collect the books from the Weybossett Bridge Northward. Capt. Joseph Tillinghast and Mr. Nicholas Brown Southward from said Bridge, William Richmond esq<sup>r</sup> and Paris J. Tillinghast on the West side of the Bridge. Jabez Bowen esq<sup>r</sup> to apply at the College."

In 1783, it was "Resolved That this Meeting be further adjourned until Wednesday next at 3 o Clock in the Afternoon. That the Town Crier at 2 o Clock in the afternoon of that day go through the Town and notify the said meeting and the Business to be transacted and Request the attendance of all the Proprietors and that all Books belonging to the Library then out in the hands of the Proprietors be brought in."

In 1818 the directors initiated a novel method of securing a quorum at their meetings by agreeing to fine themselves fifty

cents when absent from any meeting and twenty-five cents if fifteen minutes late. The money so raised was to be used for "binding or rebinding" the books of the library and as the rule continued in force during the existence of the company a small income was assured for that purpose.

The Providence Library Company issued two catalogues of its books: "Catalogue of all the books belonging to the Providence Library . . . Providence, N. E. Printed and sold by Waterman and Russell, at the New Printing Office, at the Paper-Mill, M, DCC, LXVIII"; containing also the "Rules for governing the Proprietors," and "Charter and by-laws of the Providence Library Company and a catalogue of the books of the library. Providence, Printed by Miller and Hutchens, April — 1818," a book of forty-six pages, containing Mr. John Howland's history of the institution, the charter of 1798, the amended instrument of 1817, the by-laws and regulations, and a twenty-eight page catalogue of the books in the library, then numbering 1851 volumes. Besides these sources of the history of the Company mention should be made of the "Register Book," 1753 to 1835, and the "Minute Book," 1774-1836.

The officers of the Providence Library Company, with the dates of their election, were as follows: Presidents, Jabez Bowen 1799, Moses Brown 1801, Nicholas Brown 1807, John Howland 1812, Rev. Henry Edes 1813, and Joseph L. Tillinghast 1832. Secretaries, Nicholas Brown (clerk) 1753, Theodore Foster 1774, Jonathan Gould 1787, Samuel Danforth 1795, Paris J. Tillinghast 1799, George R. Burrill 1803, Walter R. Danforth 1807, George J. Olney 1811, Walter R. Danforth 1815, William E. Richmond 1816, Benjamin Cowell 1817, John Taylor 1823, Josiah Lawton 1825, George C. Arnold 1827, Thomas C. Hartsborn 1828, and Horatio G. Bowen 1830. Treasurers, Nicholas Tillinghast 1762, Joseph Jenckes 1799, John Howland 1812, Obadiah Brown 1816, Richard J. Arnold 1823, George Curtis 1824, Charles F. Tillinghast 1825, and Allen O. Peck 1827. Librarians, Nicholas Brown 1754, Silas Downer 1762, David S.

Rowland 1767, Theodore Foster 1774, Peregrine Foster 1783, Jonathan Gould 1787, George R. Burrill 1787, Samuel Danforth 1793, Paul Allen, Jr. 1795, Col. Robert Taylor 1799, Walter R. Danforth 1809, George J. Olney 1811, Dudley C. Chappotin 1815, Samuel P. Bullard 1815, John Johnson 1816, Thomas Humphrey 1820, James W. Fosdick 1820, Wheeler Martin, 1822, Charles F. Tillinghast 1823, Charles Fitch 1825, Horace Draper 1827, Moses D. Southwick 1828, Horatio G. Bowen 1829.

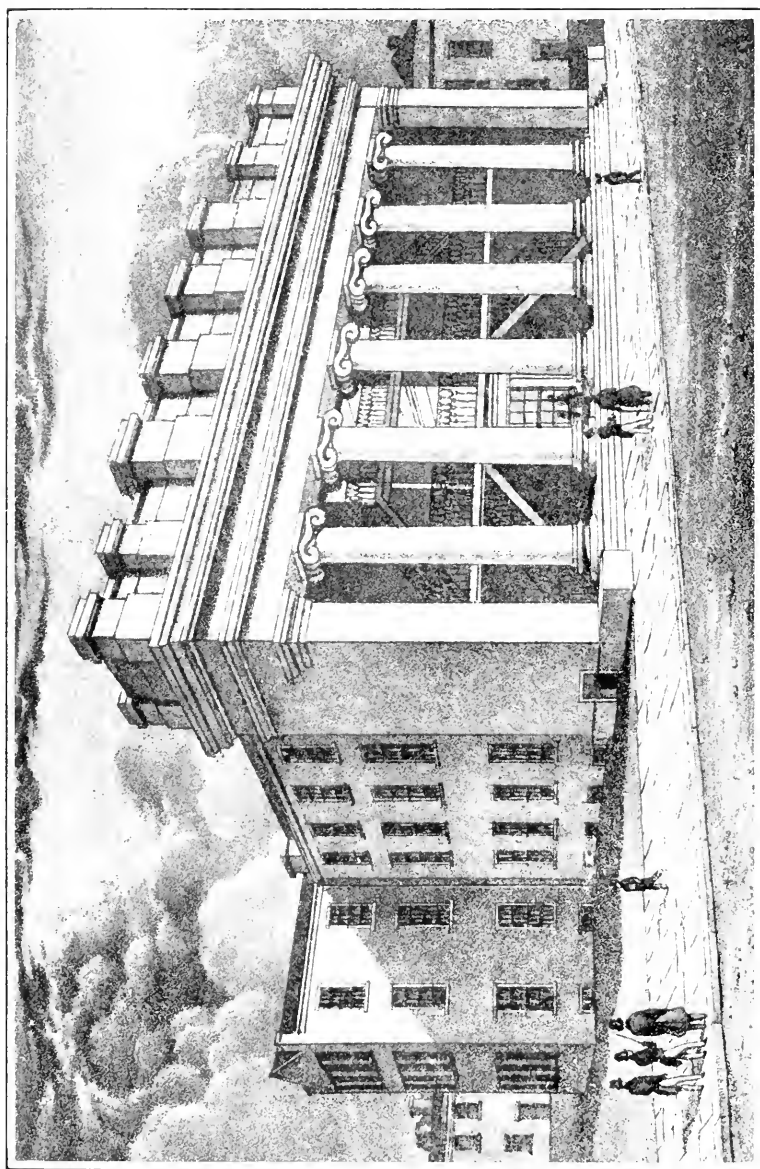
### PROVIDENCE ATHENÆUM

1831-1836

On the evening of February 21, 1831, a meeting was held at No. 51 Arcade for the purpose of considering "the expediency and practicability of establishing an Athenæum." William T. Grinnell was chosen chairman and Thomas H. Webb secretary. From this date until July 18, when an organization was effected, those interested were active in promoting the society. On April 16 the committee appointed to secure subscribers, consisting of Messrs. Thomas H. Webb, John R. Bartlett, William Butler, Richard W. Greene and Benjamin Hoppin, Jr., reported that they had obtained thirteen patrons at \$100 each and thirty-three stockholders at \$25 each, making in all forty-six subscribers, with funds amounting to \$2,125, and also that Mr. Cyrus Butler had subscribed for sixteen shares, amounting to \$400, on condition that \$2,000 be raised.

At the July meeting the secretary reported that \$3,150 had been subscribed. Tristram Burges was elected president, John Mackie and Frederick A. Farley, vice-presidents; Thomas H. Webb, secretary, John R. Bartlett, treasurer, and Lemuel H. Arnold, Thomas Burgess, Richard J. Arnold, Thomas C. Hoppin, William T. Grinnell, Richard W. Greene, Charles Dyer, William Butler, John Taylor and Stephen Tripp, trustees. A constitution and by-laws, presented by a committee consisting of Messrs. Frederick A. Farley, Thomas H. Webb and Richard W. Greene,





*From an old print*

## ARCADE

HOME OF THE OLD PROVIDENCE ATHENÆUM, 1830-1836, AND OF THE PRESENT INSTITUTION, 1836-1838



were adopted. The following were present: Messrs. Frederick A. Farley, John R. Bartlett, R. J. Arnold, Thomas C. Hoppin, William T. Grinnell, Cyrus Butler, Charles Dyer, Paris Dyer, Benjamin Dyer, William Butler, Jonathan Taylor, Stephen Tripp, S. A. Arnold, Massa Basset, P. W. Ferris, L. Branch, C. Cheney, D. T. Goodhue, Benjamin Hoppin, Jr., Jonathan Weldon, Robert Rhodes, Thomas Doyle, John Paine, W. R. Staples, Henry Anthony, John G. Anthony and Leander Utley.

An act incorporating the Athenæum, framed by Messrs. Thomas Burgess and Richard W. Greene, passed the General Assembly June 22, 1831, the names of Cyrus Butler, John Mackie, Charles Dyer and Richard W. Greene appearing in the charter as the representatives of the society. The reading room was opened early in August at Nos. 42 and 44 Arcade and the library for general circulation in December, when, according to the report made at the first annual meeting of the corporation, November 28, 1831, there were 1,159 volumes, purchased at a total cost of \$1,614.77.

The Athenæum was organized in July, 1831, and the last meeting of which there is any entry in the 'Trustees' records is April 2, 1836, when the only business transacted was a vote instructing the treasurer to inform the Arcade corporation that the Athenæum surrendered its rooms. Within a year of its establishment the trustees of the Athenæum began to consider a union with the Providence Library Company, and the subject of the union was repeatedly discussed at both board and annual meetings until its consummation.

From a brief statement concerning the old Athenæum appearing in the first annual report of the new institution, submitted in February, 1837, the following estimate of its work is taken:

"From that time (i. e. 1831) till its union in 1836, with the Providence Library, for the purpose of forming 'an enlarged institution,' suited to the wants, and creditable to the liberality and intelligence of the community, the Providence Athenæum steadily put forth all its energies for the accomplishment of the noble object which it was established to promote. Notwithstanding many

circumstances adverse to its growth, it succeeded in making, if not a large, a very choice collection of books—which ultimately constituted by far the most valuable portion of the Library of the new institution, at the date of its origin.”

The society issued one catalogue under the title “Catalogue of the Providence Athenæum Library,” Providence, 1833. This was an interesting subject grouping of the books in the library, numbering sixty-seven pages. Two record books of the society are still preserved: “Trustees’ records,” containing charter, constitution, etc., 1831 to 1836 and “Institution records,” 1831 to 1835.

The officers of the Providence Athenæum, 1831-1836, were as follows: Presidents, Tristram Burges 1831, and Frederick A. Farley 1834. First Vice-Presidents, John Mackie 1831, Frederick A. Farley 1833, and Stephen Tripp 1834. Second Vice-Presidents, Frederick A. Farley 1831, William T. Grinnell 1833, and Thomas H. Webb 1834. Secretaries, Thomas H. Webb 1831, and Daniel C. Cushing 1833. Treasurers, John R. Bartlett 1831, and Philip Allen, Jr. 1834.

#### MOVEMENT FOR THE UNION OF THE LIBRARIES

As early as July, 1832, as has already appeared, the subject of uniting the libraries began to be discussed, and formal negotiations through various committees and informal conferences continued until a final agreement was reached. At six o’clock on the evening of January 25, 1836, “a public meeting of citizens generally and of the proprietors of the Providence Library and the Athenæum companies in particular,” was held in Masonic Hall, which occupied the upper story of the old “City Building,” Market Square, now leased by the Providence Board of Trade, to take the first steps necessary in forming the new library. The call for the meeting was signed by fifty-nine persons, including Moses Brown, Nicholas Brown, Moses B. Ives, Robert H. Ives, John Carter Brown, Crawford Allen, Truman Beckwith, William Butler, Charles F. Tillinghast, Benjamin Hoppin, Cyrus Butler, Thomas C. Hoppin, John J. Stimson, Joseph Balch, Jr., Philip

Allen, Samuel Y. Atwell, Albert G. Greene, Zachariah Allen, and Sullivan Dorr. Zachariah Allen presided at the meeting and William S. Patten acted as secretary. A draft of an act of incorporation, reported by Mr. William R. Staples, was adopted and a committee appointed to petition the General Assembly for its passage. The petition sets forth, among other facts relating to the two libraries, that the Providence Library Company and the Providence Athenæum, "after mature consideration, and ineffectual attempts for a union, have severally resolved to dispose of their libraries and dissolve their corporations, in case the honorable Assembly would grant a new charter for the same objects to those of the corporators of each, and such others, as would join them in applying therefor."

According to the terms of agreement between the two library companies the books of each were to be purchased by the new institution. For those of the Providence Library the sum of \$1,000 was paid, and by the purchase of the shares of the Providence Athenæum at the rate of \$25 each, the books, furniture, etc., of that library became the property of the new Athenæum. The amount of this purchase was \$3,925. The number of volumes purchased of the Providence Library Company, exclusive of books unbound, broken sets, etc., was 1,680, and the number purchased of the Providence Athenæum was 2,400, a total of 4,080. After the terms of the purchase of the Providence Athenæum had been agreed upon many of its stockholders consented to exchange their shares for shares in the new institution, thus adding about \$700 to its funds.

#### THE PROVIDENCE ATHENÆUM 1836 TO 1911

The act of incorporation of The Providence Athenæum, as reported to the meeting of January 25, was presented to the General Assembly on January 29, 1836, and referred to the committee on education. On February 2 the act was passed by the House of representatives, concurred in by the Senate and became

a law. At the first meeting of the corporation, February 22, in Mechanics Hall, Market Square, the charter was accepted and a constitution and by-laws adopted. At an adjourned meeting, February 29, the following officers and directors were elected: Zachariah Allen, William Jenkins, John Carter Brown, Frederick A. Farley, Thomas H. Webb, William S. Patten, Thomas B. Fenner, Owen Mason, William Butler, Amasa Manton, Stephen Tripp, John J. Stimson, Henry Anthony, William R. Staples, treasurer and Thomas White, secretary.

The first meeting of the new board was held March 2, at the office of Mr. Zachariah Allen. Mr. Moses B. Ives was elected president and Mr. Zachariah Allen vice-president. Mr. Ives and Mr. Allen declining to serve Mr. John Pitman and Mr. William Giles Goddard were a week later elected to these offices. The new library was opened October 10, 1836, in rooms which had formerly been occupied by the old Athenæum, on the west side of the second story of the Arcade, No. 42 being used as a reading room and No. 44 for the library. Mr. Samuel W. Peckham, then a student in the law office of United States District Attorney Richard W. Greene, who had been elected librarian on September 26, was in charge. The hours of opening, at first fixed from three to five daily, were soon lengthened to from three to six.

Seven months before the opening of the library a communication from Messrs. Nicholas Brown and Moses B. and Robert H. Ives, for the estate of Thomas P. Ives, deceased, dated March 9, 1836, was received by the board of directors, offering "to furnish a lot of land opposite the Town House, at the junction of Benefit and College streets, for the site of an edifice to be erected of stone or brick for the suitable accommodation of the Athenæum, Historical and Franklin Societies—the lot and building to be owned by the Athenæum, and the other Societies to be accommodated therein, upon terms to be agreed on." The lot was valued by them at \$4,000. They also offered to pay \$6,000 towards the erection of such a building and \$4,000 towards the

purchase of books for the Athenæum, making a total of \$14,000, upon condition that, before the following June, the sum of \$10,000 more be made up, to be applied to the building, and \$4,000 more towards the purchase of books, by the subscriptions of responsible persons, and exclusive of moneys received for shares to be sold in the Athenæum.

The offer was accepted by the board. The committee appointed to collect the necessary subscriptions met with immediate success, the sum of \$15,604.50, an excess of \$1,604.50 above the required amount, being subscribed by 196 individuals and firms. Most of the subscribers to the fund, together with others, took shares in the new institution, fixed constitutionally at fifteen dollars, enabling the library to open with a membership of 291.

In the meantime the subject of the erection of the building by the Athenæum for its own accommodation and that of the Historical and Franklin societies had early engaged the attention of the board of directors. A plan furnished by Mr. William Strickland, of Philadelphia, was adopted, the lot of land was conveyed to the Athenæum as proposed, and Zachariah Allen, John J. Stimson and William S. Patten were appointed by the board a building committee to contract for and superintend the erection of the building. The ground was broken on April 4, 1837, and the building was commenced on the ninth of May, the interval being occupied in excavating and preparing the ground. Samuel B. Durfee, of Providence, was the master mason and Ebenezer Carpenter, of Providence, took and executed the contract for the carpenters' and joiners' work.

Under the terms of an agreement the Providence Franklin Society, founded in 1821 as the Philosophical Association, was allotted the basement story and the Rhode Island Historical Society, founded a year later, the east room of the principal story. The Historical Society never occupied the room, however, and the joint tenancy with the Franklin Society lasted but little more than a decade, the Athenæum coming into possession of the entire building in 1849.

The building was completed in the spring of 1838. The first meeting of the board of directors in its new home was held June 22. The books were removed from the Arcade in July, the building dedicated July 11 and opened for the use of shareholders July 16.

The structure, to quote the description of the building committee given in the third annual report of the institution, "is of the Grecian Doric order of architecture, constructed of granite. It is forty-eight feet in width, and seventy-eight feet in depth. The front is fine hammered granite from Quincy, Massachusetts, from the quarry owned by Nathaniel F. Potter, of Providence, who contracted for and furnished it for the sum of \$3,417, including the two fluted columns, fourteen feet high, each shaft in one piece, two feet, four and one-half inches in diameter at the base . . . The side walls of the building are of granite, from Johnston, in this state, from a quarry of Amasa Sweet. It is rough, as split from the rock, technically called 'rough ashler,' firmly secured to thick interior walls of stone."

The cost of the building was \$14,966.12, the grounds and their preparation \$3,419.66, fences, \$511.40, a total of \$18,897.18. The receipts of the institution at its commencement, from donations, subscriptions, sales of shares and contribution of the Franklin Society, were between \$33,000 and \$34,000. Of this amount nearly \$19,000 was expended on the building and grounds, as above, and \$5,000 invested in bank stock, leaving some \$9,000 for the purchase of books.

The dedication of the building by appropriate religious and literary exercises took place at the Baptist Meeting House on the afternoon of July 11. A procession, composed of various public bodies, the proprietors of the Athenæum and citizens generally, was formed at the library building, and, marshalled by Judge Thomas Burgess and Sheriff Roger Williams Potter, proceeded to the church, where a discourse was delivered by Rev. Dr. Wayland, president of Brown University. Rev. Edward B. Hall officiated as chaplain, and odes, written for the occasion by



Thomas P. Rodman and William J. Pabodie, were sung by the Providence Glee Club.

As this article is mainly concerned with the beginnings of the Athenæum as embodied in the history of the Providence Library Company, the old Providence Athenæum and the foundation of the present institution, especially as their history throws light on the early development of libraries in this country, it is not necessary to treat fully the subsequent history of the Athenæum, but under a few general headings to give only the more salient features of its later growth.

The external walls of the building remain practically as when completed in the spring of 1838. The interior, however, has undergone important alterations. The ground floor, constructed for the use of the Franklin Society, was originally divided into four rooms. In 1850-1851 the central partitions were removed, making two rooms, the front or west room being fitted up as a reading room, which it still remains, and the rear or east room, now the periodical room, being shelved for maps and bound files of newspapers. The main library room was connected with the ground floor, the present stairway being built, and a hot water system of heating introduced. The expense of these extensive alterations was mainly provided for by a verbal bequest of Cyrus Butler through Alexander Duncan.

The library room, in the principal story, was originally thirty-two feet long by forty-three feet wide, and was separated by a thick wall from another room to the east, connecting with the former by two doors. This "east room," so-called, before it was furnished with shelves for books in 1841, was often used for the free exhibition of works of art belonging to the Athenæum, or loaned for this purpose. The partition wall was removed in 1868, the two rooms being thrown into one. At the same time the accommodations for the library were largely increased by the present arrangement of alcoves and galleries, the total expense of the alterations being a little less than \$8,000. This was almost entirely provided for by voluntary subscriptions by the shareholders and others.

The general appearance of the building from the street is the same as when completed, but the surroundings are very different. At the time the edifice was erected neither the opposite nor the adjoining block of dwelling houses had been built. The site of the former, then considerably lower than the level of Benefit street, had once been temporarily occupied by a tent, or circular building, with a canvas roof for circus performances. The only noted building in the neighborhood was the old Town House, mentioned in Messrs. Brown and Ives' letter offering the gift of the land. This ancient relic continued to be an opposite neighbor until 1860, when it was torn down. Going back to the date of the erection of the building the land on the east side of Benefit street, from the corner of College street to the brick dwelling house on the corner of George street, was a high bank, sloping towards Benefit street, and probably still retained some traces of the original conformation of College Hill. The back part of it was on a level with the gangway on the east, now partly held up by the retaining wall at the rear of this building. On this eminence salutes were fired on the Fourth of July from the guns of the United Train of Artillery, whose armory was on the opposite side of the street.

For a quarter of a century no extensive changes were made in the Athenæum building. In 1894, however, there was begun a series of important alterations and improvements lasting, with little interruption, until 1898, and increasing the shelf capacity of the library some 25,000 volumes. The changes were inaugurated by the conversion of the cataloguer's room into a general reference room and librarian's room, with a capacity of 2,500 volumes. In 1896 the gallery space occupying the entire west end of the building was made into an art room through the generosity of Mrs. Elizabeth A. Shepard. The room was given and furnished in memory of her father, Professor Goddard, who was closely identified with the institution from its start until his death. The brass-tablet over the casement window of the room bears this inscription: "Art memorial room. In memory of William Giles

Goddard, a founder of the Athenæum, and the steadfast friend of sound learning and of wholesome literature. 1794-1846." During the same years the east room on the ground floor, some twenty-two by forty-three feet, was entirely remodeled, and shelved in compact stack construction to accommodate the Athenæum's large and valuable collection of bound periodicals. The room has a capacity of 12,000 volumes and is also used as a study room for club work. In 1897 the directors' room was fitted up as a reference room for Rhode Island history and genealogy and as a catalogue room. During this year an entrance also was cut through the east wall, making a much appreciated approach from College street. This same period included a new roof and skylights, introduction of electricity, thorough overhauling of the heating and plumbing systems, new fences, regrading of the grounds, planting of shrubbery, new walks and many minor repairs.

In 1906, through the active interest of one of the shareholders, a purse was raised among friends of the Athenæum for the alteration and renovation of the reading-room. Though the alcoves were removed the retention of the cornice, pilasters and most of the shelving gave the new room all the charm and character of the old.

On July 10th of the present year plans were approved by the board of directors for an extensive addition to the present building on the south and east. The southern wing is approximately thirty by forty feet and its principal room is provided with alcoves and gallery similar to the present main library room. The ground floor is an extension of the present periodical room. The addition to the east provides, on the ground floor, a boiler and unpacking room; on the main library floor, a vestibule entrance, children's room and directors' room, and on the gallery floor a room for special collections and a staff room. In adopting these plans the board has had in mind the retention, so far as possible, of the old lines of the building without and the old atmosphere and distinctive character within.

The officers of the institution have been as follows: Presidents,

John Pitman, 1836-1856; William S. Patten, 1856-1870; William Gammell, 1870-1882; Alexander Farnum, 1882-1883; Augustus Woodbury, 1883-1888; Samuel L. Caldwell, 1888-1889; Samuel W. Peckham, 1889-1895; Joseph C. Ely, 1895-1897; Royal C. Taft, 1897; Alfred Stone, 1897-1908; Stephen H. Arnold, 1908—date. Vice-Presidents: William G. Goddard, 1836-1845; George Baker, 1845-1846; William S. Patten, 1846-1856; Alexis Caswell, 1856-1868; William Gammell, 1868-1870; Alexander Farnum, 1870-1882; Augustus Woodbury, 1882-1883; Royal C. Taft, 1883-1897; Alfred Stone, 1897; Stephen H. Arnold, 1897-1908; John C. Pegram, 1909; William L. Hodgman, 1910—date. Treasurers: William R. Staples, 1836; Stephen Tripp, 1836-1845; Thomas M. Burgess, 1845-1847; Stephen T. Olney, 1847-1850; Henry Anthony, 1850; Henry T. Beckwith, 1850-1860; Amasa Paine, 1860-1863; Henry T. Cornett, 1863-1865; Stephen H. Arnold, 1865-1897; Charles R. Stark, 1897-1905; Charles T. Dorrance, 1905—date. Secretaries: Thomas White, 1836; Samuel W. Peckham, 1836-1845; Samuel Austin, 1845-1847; Isaac Proud, 1847-1849; Albert J. Jones, 1849-1854; John Gorham, 1854-1856; Samuel W. Peckham, 1856-1857; James Tillinghast, 1857-1871; Charles P. Robinson, 1871-1877; William M. Bailey, Jr., 1877-1893; Charles T. Dorrance, 1893; Pardon S. Jastram, 1893—date. Librarians: Samuel W. Peckham, 1836-1838; Stephen R. Weeden, 1838-1845; Thomas H. Williams, 1845-1854; J. Dunham Hedge, 1854-1879; Daniel Beckwith, 1879-1894, and Joseph L. Harrison, 1894—date.

Of those included in this list of officers two stand out conspicuously because of their long service and deep interest in the Athenæum. Judge Peckham was actively identified with the institution from its incorporation in 1836 until his death, in 1895. He served as the first librarian, 1836 to 1838, as secretary from 1836 to 1845, seven terms as director and as president from 1889 to 1895. Mr. Arnold has been in continuous service as an officer of the Athenæum for nearly half a century. He was treasurer

from 1865 to 1897, vice-president from 1897 to 1908 and has held the office of president since 1908.

The present governing board is made up as follows:—Stephen H. Arnold, president; William L. Hodgman, vice-president; Charles T. Dorrance, treasurer; Pardon S. Jastram, secretary. Directors: Arthur P. Sumner, Frederick H. Jackson, N. Darrell Harvey, Edward S. Clark, Zechariah Chafee, Henry A. DuVillard, Edward D. Pearce, William C. Poland, Albert E. Ham, Howard L. Clark, Edward F. Ely, Harold P. Waterman, Otis Everett. Auditing Committee: Arthur Knight, Eugene W. Mason, Fletcher S. Mason.

From the first the Athenæum has been the recipient of many and valuable gifts of money, of books and of works of art. In 1849 Alexander Duncan, in accordance with the wishes of Cyrus Butler, gave \$6,000 to be added to the permanent endowment fund and \$4,000 to pay off the old debt to the Franklin Society and make necessary alterations in the basement. In 1865 Thomas Poynton Ives left a bequest of \$10,000, which was subsequently added to the endowment fund. In 1867 twenty-one subscribers contributed \$3,285 to the endowment fund and the following year eighty-nine shareholders gave \$7,722 for alterations in the building. In 1896 Mrs. Elizabeth A. Shepard gave the art room, shelved and fully furnished for use. At various times from 1896-1906, shareholders contributed \$5,917, including \$1,000 given for the special purpose of renovating the reading room, towards the general improvements of the building and grounds.

The Athenæum has received seven book funds as follows: The Allen Brown Bequest of \$500, bequeathed in 1861 as an unrestricted book fund. The Carrington Hoppin Fund of \$3,000, bequeathed in 1879, and at Mr. Hoppin's request limited in its use to the purchase of books relating to Italy and Italian art. The Thomas P. I. Goddard Fund of \$10,000, given in 1889 and used in accordance with the expressed desire of the donor for

the purchase of "standard works of permanent value." The Albert Jones Fund of \$1,000, bequeathed in 1887, and limited by the terms of the will to the purchase of books "illustrating the arts of design as applied to decorative or industrial art." The William M. Bailey, Jr. Memorial Fund of \$1,000, raised by friends of Mr. Bailey for the purchase of books, engravings and photographs relating to architecture. The Elizabeth A. Shepard Book Fund of \$3,000, given in 1905 and 1906 by Mrs. T. P. Shepard as a general book fund. The Miller Fund, bequeathed in 1900 by Mrs. Helen Woods Miller, widow of Dr. Horace G. Miller, the income to be applied for the purchase of books.

Among the more valuable works of art, all of them gifts, may be mentioned: Copy of Stuart's portrait of Washington, executed by an Italian artist from the original painted for the Marquis of Lansdowne; portrait of Cyrus Butler; portrait of James G. Percival, by Alexander; marble bust of John Pitman, by George O. Annable; "The Hours," by Edward G. Malbone, perhaps the most noted work of this celebrated miniature painter; portrait of Washington Allston, by Chester Harding; Cavalier of the time of Charles I., by Van Dyke; portrait of John Hampden, by Gandy; portrait of Theophila Palmer, known as "A girl reading," by Sir Joshua Reynolds; marble bust of Shakespeare; portrait of Zachary Taylor, by C. A. Foster; miniature of Nicholas Power, by Malbone; Malbone's portrait sketch of himself; portrait of Mrs. Sarah Helen Whitman, by C. G. Thompson; Wandering Jew, water color by Horace Vernet; portrait of Samuel W. Peckham, from his heirs, 1897; bronze tablet in honor of the Carrington Hoppin bequest; and a portrait of Joseph C. Ely, by Hugo Breul.

Among other gifts may be mentioned a drinking fountain from Mrs. Anna Richmond and a bequest of \$5,000 from Joseph J. Cooke for the purchase of books from his private library. It may be noted that a number of the paintings, including the Van Dyke and Reynolds, were given by Ethelbert R. Billings and the miniature of Nicholas Power by his daughter, Mrs. Sarah Helen Whitman.

"The Hours" was painted by Malbone in 1801 during a seven months' sojourn in London. It was given by the artist to his sister, Mrs. Harriet Whitehorne, wife of John G. Whitehorne, of Newport. Mrs. Whitehorne died in 1853 and her executor, to carry out her wish that the picture should remain in the artist's native state, suggested that it be purchased for the Athenæum. Acting on the suggestion, Miss Elizabeth B. Patten, afterward Mrs. Arthur F. Dexter, then scarcely more than a girl, collected from 119 friends of the institution most of the necessary money, and the miniature came into possession of the Athenæum on August 26, 1854.

In connection with the portrait of Mrs. Whitman it may be noted that one of the Athenæum's treasures is a volume of Colton's *American review* for 1847, the December number of which contains the anonymous poem *Ulalume* with Edgar Allan Poe's signature attached. The story is that Mrs. Whitman, who was then engaged to Poe, asked him one day when they were in the Athenæum, if he had read the new poem and if he knew its author. He surprised her by acknowledging himself the author, and taking up the library copy of the magazine signed his name at the end of the poem.

It may be stated broadly regarding the growth of the institution that during the seventy-five years of its history from 1836 to 1911 its endowment fund has increased from \$5,000 to \$52,138.03, receipts from annual and other rights from \$1,465 to \$7,258, the number of shares from 293 to 1,000, the number of volumes in the library from 4,162 to 76,576 volumes and the annual circulation from 3,684 to 62,927.

The Athenæum has issued four printed catalogues, as follows Catalogue of the Athenæum library, Providence, 1837; First supplementary catalogue, Providence, 1839; Catalogue of the library of The Providence Athenæum, Providence, 1853, and First supplementary catalogue, Providence, 1861. Its card catalogue, a full dictionary catalogue, was begun in 1883. In 1895 the Dewey decimal system of classification was adopted and the entire re-

organization of the cataloguing and shelf arrangement of the library begun. This work has now been practically completed.

The constitution, by-laws and regulations have been changed from time to time as the interests of the Athenæum demanded. Perhaps the most comprehensive and far reaching revision of these instruments was that of 1895, made under the presidency of Mr. Joseph C. Ely, who brought to the task not only a remarkably keen and sympathetic appreciation of the traditions of the Athenæum but an equally thorough knowledge of its needs. Mr. Ely desired to present to the corporation and board a revised code which would bring the institution more in line with the spirit and methods of modern library work, increase its power of service and enlarge its general efficiency. With these objects in view he framed what was practically, as far as the operation of the library was concerned, a new constitution, by-laws and regulations. The constitution and by-laws were adopted by the corporation in September, 1895, and the regulations by the board in October of the same year. The salient feature of the revised constitution was a new article defining for the first time the character of the institution, as follows :

“The purpose and aim of The Providence Athenæum shall be to furnish a home library, larger, better arranged, more useful and more attractive than that within the means of any individual shareholder; and the scope of its growth, the acquisition of books of general literature and other works, publications and periodicals in literature or art which conduce to general culture, to the exclusion of any publications of a purely technical or professional character, which latter shall only be purchased from funds especially given for such purpose.”

Mr. Ely's judgment has been found sound. During the sixteen years which have elapsed since the adoption of the policy he outlined and earnestly advocated the endowment fund has increased twenty-three per cent, the income from annual and other rights seventy-seven per cent, the number of shareholders thirty-six per cent, the number of volumes in the library thirty-nine per cent and the annual circulation forty-six per cent.



But in no way has the growth and strength of the Athenæum been more strikingly shown than during the presidency of Mr. Arnold, when, in 1909, the constitutional limit of 1,000 shares, fixed the previous year, was reached, realizing a hope voiced in nearly every annual report since the incorporation of the institution in 1836, and again, at the meeting of the corporation in 1909, when the annual tax, established in 1836 at five dollars, was raised to seven-dollars-and-a-half, the shares from fifteen to twenty-five dollars and non-assessable shares from \$140 to \$175. After three-quarters of a century of the old order the test was severe, but that the judgment of the board in advocating the increase and of the corporation in voting it was sound and voiced the sentiment of the constituency was demonstrated by the result, for not only was there no adverse criticism, but, on the contrary, many expressions of approval.

On February 28, 1911, the Athenæum celebrated very simply and quietly, in its own reading-room, the seventy-fifth anniversary of its incorporation. Addresses were made by its president, Mr. Arnold, Hon. William B. Weeden and Dr. William H. P. Faunce. The tradition, the atmosphere and that intangible something which may be called the spirit of the old institution were so charmingly and feelingly brought out by Dr. Faunce that his summing up of what is after all the real essence of the Athenæum may fittingly be quoted in conclusion:

"I find it quite impossible to speak of the Athenæum in an impersonal way, and so I hope you will forgive me if I fail to do it. When Disraeli was asked how it was that he got along so well with Queen Victoria while Gladstone was always in difficulty, he answered: 'The matter is very simple. I always treat the Queen as a woman, while Gladstone always seems to approach her as a public institution.' Now, the Athenæum is vastly more than a public institution. To those of us who know it, and have known it for a generation, it is an influence intellectual, spiritual, almost personal . . . Through the kindness of a classmate, I was introduced to this building, so stern without, so warm and friendly

within. I can truly say that this is the only library in all the world that I ever loved. The long golden afternoons that I spent in these alcoves are among the happiest recollections of my life. The repose, the seclusion, the still and quiet air of delightful studies, the fading light as the sun was sinking down over the city, the hushed footsteps, the touch of vanished hands in every alcove — all this produced an impression well-nigh religious . . .

“I am sure there are many here to-day, whose recollections of this spot are of the same rich and grateful character as my own. ‘Yes,’ people may say, ‘that is just the trouble. It is all recollection, all a mere reminiscence of what was, and cannot be again *Troja fuit*. The subscription library has had its day and played its part. Peace to its ashes! But something more democratic, better fitted for the present service of the commonwealth we may now expect and demand.’ How familiar the sound! We have heard the same thing said about the Christian Church, that it is somewhat musty in the present day, and other organizations must succeed it. Many times in the last few years we have heard the same thing said of the college, that the technical school now has the field, that the utilitarian studies are sweeping everything before them; that there is no longer place for history, philosophy, art, and literature. Well, if we want no place we shall have no place; in the intellectual world wanting is the first step in having. It is the will to believe, the will to create, and the will to preserve, that count for the most in the realm of the spirit. Surely a heritage of a century and a half — for that is what the Athenæum really may claim — a heritage of a century and a half is not lightly to be flung away. Not everything old is thereby proved to be bad, even in America. The fact that there are invisible roots running down deep into the life of this state, roots such as no brand-new institution could possibly possess, should make us who are here to-day prize very highly this venerable institution, redolent of the life of our state, and we should preserve and maintain it as we preserve and maintain our ancient liberties. This is a part of our soul-liberty, the expression of the early genius of Rhode Island . . .

"The cultural side of life has found a strong bulwark in the existence and growth of this institution; and while the specialist in certain fields of knowledge must always come by preference to the University Library, and while our children and young people for certain lines of reading may go naturally to the great Public Library, in whose beneficent success we rejoice, yet there will always be a large number of families in Providence who need just what this institution has to offer.

"I am convinced that, amid the great utilitarian movements of our age, more and more we need buildings and institutions that stand for the things of the spirit. We need structures that stand for memory and hope and imagination, that offer to the reader a little solitude, which shall be to his spirit what space is to the tree, enabling it to strike in its roots and put forth its fruit . . .

"Let us believe in our historic enterprise and so create a future for it. Let us never falter for an instant, or admit to any man that here is simply a remnant of the past, fading slowly out in the light of the new democracy. It is the new democracy that most needs the old heritage of reverence and faith and poise of spirit. It is democracy that must be saved from crudity and obscurantism and made familiar with our intellectual heritage. Changes must come to all things human, to home and school and church and city. Even this granite front must crumble. But ideas and ideals survive and are transmitted from age to age. Instead of dwindling they shine with increasing light and power. That we appreciate some of these ideals and would convey them to remote generations—that is the meaning of the simple but heart-felt exercises of this winter afternoon."

















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